CLAIMS

<u>WHAT IS CLAIMED IS</u>:

1. A method for providing a persistent connection between a client and a real server, the method comprising:

   receiving a request originating from a client for connection to a virtual server;

   selecting a real server associated with the virtual server for connection with the client based only on a natural class of an IP address of a device sending the request; and

   forwarding to the selected real server transmissions originating from the client.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein selecting a real server comprises selecting the same real server for all clients having the same natural class subnet.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a request comprises receiving a request from a firewall and wherein the IP address of the device is the IP address of the firewall.

5   4. The method of claim 1 wherein the request is an HTTP request.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a request comprises receiving a request at a local director.

10   6. A computer program product for providing a persistent connection between a client and a server, the product comprising:

code that receives a request originating from a client for connection to a virtual server;

code that selects a real server associated with the virtual server for

15   connection with the client based only on a natural class of an IP address of a device sending the request;

code that forwards to the selected real server transmission originating from the client; and

a computer-readable storage medium for storing the codes.

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7. The computer program product of claim 6 wherein the computer-readable medium is selected from the group consisting of CD-ROM, floppy disk, tape, flash memory, system memory, hard drive, and data signal embodied in a carrier wave.

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8. The computer program product of claim 6 wherein the code that selects a real server comprises code that selects the same real server for all clients having the same natural class subnet.

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9. The computer program product of claim 6 wherein the code that receives a request comprises code that receives a request from a firewall and wherein the IP address of the device is the IP address of the firewall.

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10. A computer system for providing a persistent connection between a client and a server, the system comprising:

a virtual server; and

a processor for selecting one of a plurality of real servers for connection

5   to a client based only on a natural class of an IP address of a device sending a request from the client for connection to the virtual server.

11. The computer system of claim 10 further comprising a forwarding agent configured to forward transmissions originating from the client to the

10   selected real server.

12. The system of claim 10 further comprising a server load balancer.

13. The system of claim 10 wherein the device is a firewall.

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14. The system of claim 10 wherein the device is a router.

15. The system of claim 10 wherein the device is a proxy server.

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16. A system for directing flow between a client and two or more real servers, the system comprising:

means for receiving a request originating from a client for connection to a

5   virtual server;

means for selecting a real server associated with the virtual server for connection with the client based only on a natural class of an IP address of a device sending the request; and

means for forwarding to the selected real server transmissions originating

10   from the client.

17. The system of claim 16 wherein means for selecting a real server for connecting with the client comprises selecting the same real server for requests received from IP addresses having the same natural class subnet.

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